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FACTS ABOUT CUMBERLAND HOMESTEADS

Department of Agriculture
Farm Security Administration

OFFICIAL NAME: Cumberland Homesteads

LOCATION: In Cumberland County, on the Cumberland Plateau, east-central Tennessee. Four and one-half miles from Crossville, seventy-six miles west of Knoxville, ninety miles north of Chattanooga, and one hundred and twenty miles east of Nashville.

HISTORY OF PROJECT: By the Division of Subsistence Homesteads, December 10, 1933. Transferred by Executive Order to the Resettlement Administration, May 15, 1935.

PURPOSE OF PROJECT: The project is designed for the rehabilitation of three groups of families: timber workers, miners, and farmers in poor land areas.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: Construction of 251 new homes and development work from which the homesteaders originally derived their livelihood has been completed. The men have now found work at the canning factory which employs 300 workers and in the coal mine on the project. These co-operative enterprises are owned by the Cumberland Homesteaders' Cooperative Association, a non-profit community association with homestead membership chartered under the laws of the State of Tennessee.

Many of the families supplement their cash income by raising crops on individual tracts of 17 acres. Approximately 80,000 quarts of fruits and vegetables were canned by homemakers last year for family consumption. In their spare time, many of the women weave curtains and rugs at the weaving shop where they are instructed in the art.

Community facilities include a new grammar school, a high school, an administration building, and a trading post.

HOUSE DESCRIPTION: Homes are of four to seven rooms, equipped with modern plumbing and electricity. Fifteen architectural plans, eight of which are recurring, have been used in constructing the houses which are built of local materials -- native Crab Orchard Stone and white pine.

HOMESTEADERS :

Cumberland homesteaders were selected from approximately 4,000 families applying for one of the 251 homesteads in the community. Many of them had been dependent upon public and private relief funds for as long as five years. An early survey of the homesteaders revealed that more than 75 percent were unemployed at the time they applied. This distress was caused by economic conditions. In 1920, the coal mines and commercial timber operations provided full-time jobs and cash for the families on the Plateau. Thousands of men were busy swinging axes, felling, trimming, sawing, and hauling its rich resources in timber. The coal mines were running double shifts. Fifteen years changed this picture. Continual cutting depleted the timber resources to the point where further commercial operations were unprofitable. The development of new fuels, the invention and improvement of machinery, the competition from areas richer in coal and better located with respect to transportation caused the abandonment and closing of the mines. Many of these timber workers and miners turned to farming to eke a livelihood. Others, however, lived in poor land areas incapable of providing even bare subsistence.

